



Testimony of

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Disconnected Youth: Out of Work and Out of School

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My name is Grant Cowles and I am the Senior Policy and Advocacy Associate for Youth Justice at Citizens' Committee for Children (CCC). CCC is a 73-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

We would first like to thank City Council Youth Services Committee Chair Mathieu Eugene and the members of the Committee on Youth Services for holding today's oversight hearing on disconnected youth, and for introducing local laws aimed at strengthening the City's ability to meet the needs of these young people. CCC appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on disconnected youth and we support the creation of a "disconnected youth" task force.

The term "Disconnected Youth" is defined to mean youth aged 16 to 24 year olds who are neither in school nor employed, sometimes referred to as "out of school and out of work" (OSOW). In New York City, there are over 140,000 disconnected youth, which is approximately 14% of all 16 to 24 year olds living in New York City.¹

It is critical for New York City to better meet the needs of this relatively large population of New Yorkers. By virtue of not being connected to school or the workplace, disconnected youth are often also disconnected from many social and economic supports, and thus face many barriers to success. Disconnected youth are statistically more likely to have long-term lower employment rates, lower incomes, lack of health insurance, higher public assistance rates, lower social and marital rates, and higher criminal justice supervision rates.² Communities also suffer when the next generation includes fewer educated or skilled workers, when there is an increased reliance on public assistance, when there are greater needs for physical and mental health care, when there are more public costs from crime and criminal supervision, and when there is an increased risk of continuing a cycle of poverty and disconnection.³

Keeping youth from disconnecting in the first place, as well as reengaging disconnected youth are critical for these youth as well as the future of New York City. Addressing this issue requires understanding what causes it, how to prevent it and what interventions work best for those youth who are disconnected. It is important to note that each of the individual young people has unique needs and thus there is no one perfect program for all disconnected youth.

¹ CCC Analysis of the 2015 American Community Survey.

² See Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara. "Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16 to 24 Year Olds Who Are Not Working or in School, Congressional Research Service," Oct. 1, 2015. Available at <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40535.pdf>.

³ A study from 2012 examined the taxpayer and societal costs of lost earnings, lower economic growth, lower tax revenues, and higher government spending associated with youth who are not working or in school. The study attributed the immediate taxpayer costs for these youth at \$13,900 and societal costs at \$37,450. The study estimated future lifetime costs for these youth at age 25 and older at \$170,740 in taxpayer costs and \$529,030 in societal costs. These estimates are in 2011 dollars. Clive R. Belfield, Henry M. Levin, and Rachel Rosen. "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth," Queens College, City University of New York and Teachers College, Columbia University in association with Civic Enterprises, January 2012, http://www.serve.gov/sites/default/files/ctools/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf.

In New York City, 27.5% of disconnected youth do not have a high school diploma or the equivalent, and nearly half (44.3%) have a high school diploma or the equivalent.⁴ Approximately 10% have a college degree.⁵ Notably, there are large disparities among youth who are disconnected based on geography and by race and ethnicity. In 14 of the City's Community Districts, more than 1 in 5 16-24 year olds are out of school and out of work.⁶ In Mott Haven and Hunts Points, 1 out of every 3 youth aged 16-24 year olds are disconnected.⁷ Black males have the highest rate of disconnection at 22.1%. Notably, three quarters of all disconnected youth citywide are Black or Latino.⁸

Addressing income inequality in New York City must include a focus on addressing the issue of disconnected youth and investing in the programs and services that will help improve the outcomes for this very large population of young adults. Keeping youth from disconnecting and reengaging disconnected youth requires a holistic system of support for our city's vulnerable youth. **We urge the administration and the City Council to work together to create both a vision and a plan for addressing the needs of youth who are both out of work and out of school.**

To accomplish this, CCC respectfully makes the following recommendations:

1) **Pass Local Law 708 creating a Disconnected Youth Task Force.**

A new time-limited task force, with the right stakeholders and cross-agency collaboration, can review existing data and programs and then make recommendations for the City to better meet the needs of disconnected youth. Having a good breadth of membership, while also ensuring the membership is not too large, can help provide the strategic alignment and planning needed to help youth who may not be involved with any city programs or who alternatively may touch several different systems and programs. There is also an opportunity to address the ongoing challenge of coordinating all the entities attempting to engage disconnected youth, including city agencies, service providers, advocates, and community led efforts.

CCC would like to emphasize that the task force should take advantage of the research and work already conducted by many organizations within New York City and across the country in order to not to replicate work that has already been done.

CCC also suggests that the task force include, in addition to the members proposed in the bill, one representative from the following groups/agencies

- Human Resources Administration (HRA)
- A member from the Mayor's Office working on youth employment issues.
- a provider serving runaway and homeless youth

⁴ CCC Analysis of the 2015 American Community Survey.

⁵ Id.

⁶ CCC Analysis of the 2013-2015 American Community Survey. These 14 Community Districts are Hunts Points, Mott Haven, Central Harlem, East Flatbush, Unionport/Soundview, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville-Ocean Hill, Bedford Park, Morrisania, East Tremont, East New York, Concourse/Highbridge, Crown Heights North and St. George.

⁷ CCC Analysis of the 2015 American Community Survey.

⁸ Id.

- a representative from CUNY
- a parent

2) **Invest in employment skills training and work opportunities.**

Efforts to engage young people in job training and work is often what makes the difference for disconnected youth. CCC encourages the City to work to expand these programs and target them to youth based on which program is most likely to meet their needs.

a. Expand existing programs that provide job training, job readiness, internships, and employment.

Currently, the City has a number of programs and services sponsored by the city that are intended to provide employment and job training skills for disconnected youth. These programs are offered by the Center for Economic Community, Human Resource Administration, Division of Youth and Community Development, and the Department of Education, among others.

CCC recommends that the City take a closer look at these programs and begin to scale up those that have shown success. There are likely a number of programs, such as Project Rise through CEO, that could be expanded. Similarly, DYCD's OSY (Out of School Youth) program served 2,265 youth in FY2016⁹ and could potentially be expanded with City funds. The City Council has been funding Work, Learn, Grow, which could also potentially be targeted for more disconnected youth, baselined and then increased.

b. Target outreach to communities with high numbers of disconnected youth

A disproportionate number of disconnected youth are living in high poverty neighborhoods, are youth of color, and are living in communities with adults who also experience low educational attainment and are themselves disconnected.¹⁰ Outreach programs that can link disconnected youth to needed supports should be developed and targeted to communities where large populations of disconnected youth reside. Youth should be offered flexibility to participate in programs in their communities of origin as well as elsewhere in the city, and outreach programs should facilitate referral and connection to programs, based on youth needs.

⁹ Mayor's Management Report Fiscal Year 2016. Department of Youth and Community Development, p. 224. <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2016/dycd.pdf>.

¹⁰ Sarah Burd-Sharps and Kristen Lewis. "One in Seven: Ranking Youth Disconnection in the 25 Largest Metro Areas," Measure of America of the Social Science Research Council, September 2012, p. 24-25. Available at http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/MOA-One_in_Seven09-14.pdf.

3) **Enhance efforts to provide educational services that will lay the groundwork for youth to further their education and/or build their job skills.**

For many young people, reconnecting to education will set them on a path to success. Interestingly, in the evaluation of Project Rise, youth reported being more interested in the educational opportunities than the internship programs. This is an important finding to build upon.

a. **Increase access to adult literacy programs.**

Literacy is a fundamental skill required for education and most employment opportunities, yet many disconnected youth and high school dropouts have extremely low literacy skills and cannot qualify for high school equivalency credentials which require participants to read at eighth-grade level or above.¹¹ Research shows that most high school dropouts attempt to reconnect at some point through education or other vocational preparation programs.¹² In order to support this reconnection, literacy programs for youth and young adults (such as the Center for Economic Opportunity's Young Adult Literacy program and DYCD's literacy program) should be expanded to better meet the need.

b. **Provide and expand educational opportunities for disconnected youth.**

As mentioned, most people who do not finish high school will attempt to reconnect with educational programs at some point. Programs that provide meaningful remedial education, skills training, diploma opportunities, and college opportunities can provide tremendous benefits to disconnected youth. As an example, Project Rise's programming includes internship opportunities, but they found that the participants were most attracted to Project Rise's educational components. Notably, within 12 months of enrolling in Project Rise, 28.3% of participants had earned a high school equivalency credential.¹³

4) **Increase access to early childhood education in New York City for young parents who are disconnected.**

Early childhood education and after-school programs not only help children succeed in school, but also enable parents to work or continue their own education. According to data compiled in 2013, 65,000 New York City young people were out of the labor market due to caretaking responsibilities.¹⁴ While the recent expansion of universal pre-kindergarten for 4 year olds may have helped alleviate this barrier for some young

¹¹ Farhana Hossain and Emily Terwelp. "Improving Outcomes for New York City's Disconnected Youth: Lessons from the Implementation of the Young Adult Literacy Program," MDRRC, February 2015, p. 1. Available at http://mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Improving_Outcomes_for_NYC_Disconnected_Youth.pdf.

¹² Id.

¹³ "Project Rise: Reconnecting Disconnected Youth," NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, October 2015.

Available at http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/Project_Rise_Implementation_Report_October_2015_Findings_at_a_Glance.pdf.

¹⁴ James Parrott and Lazar Treschan. "Barriers to Entry: The Increasing Challenges Faced by Young Adults in the New York City Labor Market," JobsFirstNYC, 2013. P. 6. Available at http://lghhttp.58547.nexcesscdn.net/803F44A/images/nycss/images/uploads/pubs/JFNYC_Barriers_to_Entry_5-2-13_SPL%20%282%29.pdf.

parents, there is still a large unmet need for early childhood education and afterschool programs. A recent study by CCC and the Campaign for Children found that only 14% of income eligible infants and toddlers (up to age 3) were enrolled in early education programs through ACS.¹⁵ Increasing the capacity of the subsidized early childhood education system would enable more young, disconnected parents to reconnect to education and/or employment activities.

5) Prevent youth from becoming disconnected youth

The best way to help disconnected youth would be to prevent youth from becoming disconnected in the first place.

- a. Utilize early education to provide the foundation for children to learn and remain engaged in school and connected to the workforce.

Research shows that children who receive high quality early childhood education are more likely to avoid disconnection later in life.¹⁶ Among the positive outcomes from early education that help keep youth connected include higher rates of high school graduation, post-secondary education, and obtaining a skilled job.¹⁷ Thus, it is critical that the City continue to increase the capacity of the early childhood system.

- b. Increase the use of restorative justice programs and continue to decrease use of suspensions and other exclusionary disciplinary practices in schools.

Suspensions have a strong impact on youth disconnection. Students who are suspended are more likely to be retained a grade, more likely to drop out, less likely to graduate, and more likely to face involvement in the justice system.¹⁸ There are many positive steps already underway to decrease the overreliance on suspensions in New York City, with a chief replacement being restorative practice programs. In the 2015-2016 school year, there were 37,647 suspensions, a remarkable 46% drop compared to five years ago.¹⁹

Restorative practices create a more positive and communal environment in schools that leads to less disengagement by youth who otherwise might be suspended, but it also fosters a more welcoming environment for all students, encouraging not only attendance, but meaningful engagement. New York City schools should continue to use and expand the use of restorative practices to keep

¹⁵ “NYC’s Early Childhood Education System Meets Only a Fraction of the Need,” Campaign for Children, September 2015, p. 2. Available at http://www.campaignforchildreennyc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Child-Care-Need-2015_final.pdf.

¹⁶ See “Research on Early Childhood Education,” National Education Association, NEA.org. Available at <http://www.nea.org/home/18226.htm>.

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ “Keeping Kids in School and Out of Court,” New York City School-Justice Partnership Task Force, May 2013, p. iv. Available at <https://www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren/PDF/NYC-School-JusticeTaskForceReportAndRecommendations.pdf>.

¹⁹ Student Discipline, Suspension Reports, NYC Department of Education. Available at <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/D43B80C2-45D7-44C1-BBE9-D18632224545/0/10042016AnnualReportonSTUDENTDISCIPLINE.xlsx>.

youth from becoming disconnected and to use restorative models to reconnect youth who leave school for any reason.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.