



THE LEGISLATURE  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

June 29, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
Executive Chamber  
State Capitol  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write with an urgent request that requires your immediate attention. As you know, the FY 2020-2021 Budget finalized on April 2, 2020, included \$45 million for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). This funding, which is allocated from New York's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, goes to support subsidized wages for the lowest-income SYEP participants and SYEP activities for counties across the State. In total, our investment funds approximately 19,000 summer employment experiences for young New Yorkers.

While we completely understand the health and public safety concerns posed by the traditional, in-person internship-based model of SYEP as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen counties work quickly across the State to develop alternative, safe program models that are ready to operate beginning in July. Those localities have run into challenges coordinating with NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). OTDA must approve the alternative plans submitted by the localities, but as of June 26, 2020, all the plans submitted are still "under review" by OTDA and it is unclear whether funds will be available to localities for summer 2020 programming.

Furthermore, OTDA released guidance to Departments of Social Service this week stating that:

*At least 80% [of SYEP participants] must be engaged in traditional paid employment activities with no more than 30% of hourly participation for these SYEP participants in non-employment activities such as career exploration, mentoring outside the workplace, financial literacy, or education. Paid employment may include remote work so long as the position is consistent with work the employer would typically engage in but is being conducted remotely due to COVID-19 business requirements or precautions.*

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

June 29, 2020

Page 2

Depending on the locality, many are unprepared to meet this benchmark. Most of the planning done in preparation for Summer 2020 has been done under the assumption that virtual learning/career exploration would make up a large portion of programming. With programming traditionally commencing in early July, it is too late for localities to shift their plans and develop sufficient worksites to comply with these requirements.

State legislators work every year to make SYEP a priority and ensure that these funds are included in the budget. Keeping SYEP funded at last years' level was particularly difficult during this budget as we were dealing with a rapidly growing deficit which left us unable to restore numerous programs to prior year levels. We are disappointed that OTDA would delay in approving the plans submitted to them, because the uncertainty that results means that providers across the State are left in limbo, unsure--with two weeks before programming should begin--whether or not they have the necessary funds to proceed.

During the current pandemic, with unemployment numbers expected to reach 500,000 in New York City alone, every dollar counts. The wages earned by young people through SYEP will be more critical than in previous years. We implore you to instruct OTDA to work swiftly to approve the plans submitted by localities so that DOB can release the funds to localities and programming can begin on time. We are struck by the racial and economic disparities revealed in the recently released statistics on COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths, and are acutely aware of how the economic impact caused by the pandemic will be felt hardest in the low-income communities that most benefit from the State's SYEP investment.

We look forward to working with you to resolve this issue.

In partnership,



Senator Roxanne J. Persaud  
Chair, Senate Social Services Committee



Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi  
Chair, Assembly Social Services Committee



Senator Velmanette Montgomery  
Chair, Senate Children & Families Committee



Assemblywoman Ellen C. Jaffee  
Chair, Assembly Children & Families Committee

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

June 29, 2020

Page 3

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Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo

June 29, 2020

Page 4

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