



# ***NYS YOUTHBUILD COALITION***

*20 Arlmont Street, Kingston, NY (845) 399-2757 Fax (845) 331-2531*

*Bonnie Landi, Chair  
Paige Bellenbaum, Downstate Vice Chair  
Jennifer Lawrence, Upstate Vice Chair*

## **Testimony to Joint Legislative Public Hearings 2015-2016 Executive Budget Proposal On Workforce Development**

**February 27, 2015**

Comments by Bonnie Landi, Chair of NYS YouthBuild Coalition, 20 Arlmont Street, Kingston, NY 12401, [ymcayb.landi@gmail.com](mailto:ymcayb.landi@gmail.com), 845-399-2757 and Jennifer Lawrence, Upstate Vice-Chair of NYS YouthBuild Coalition, [jennifer.lawrence@neparentchild.org](mailto:jennifer.lawrence@neparentchild.org), 518-372-4100 X2803

Senator DeFrancisco, Assembly Member Farrell and distinguished members of the committees. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of NYS YouthBuild programs and the request for a budget add-on to the FY 2015-16 Executive Budget, which was submitted for your consideration by NYS Legislative Members in the Senate and the Assembly.

Our comments relate to the urgent need for funding to support NYS YouthBuild programs. Currently there are 17 operating programs located in Albany, Buffalo, Brooklyn, South Bronx, Harlem, East Harlem, Jamaica Queens, Long Island, Manhattan, Kingston, Poughkeepsie, Troy, Rochester, Schenectady, Syracuse, Utica, and White Plains. In addition to these currently operating programs, we know of agencies in Auburn, Ithaca, Jamestown, Newburgh, Olean, Rome, and Yonkers, who have applied for YouthBuild program funding but to date have been unsuccessful.

YouthBuild is a comprehensive education, hands-on skills training, community service, and leadership development program, providing young people who have dropped out of high school, an opportunity to transform their lives and become responsible, contributing adults. YouthBuild as a program serves the most at-risk young people in communities and, it originated in New York State before expanding nationally. It is an exciting New York State "Best Practice" that now serves thousands of young people each year in 273 programs located in 44 states; providing a service to high school dropouts that most communities would lack, if it were not for YouthBuild.

## YOUTHBUILD IS AN URGENT NEED

As you are aware in New York State, thousands of young people ages 16 - 24 drop out of school annually. The number remains high and continues to increase. We hear various reasons from those that are served by YouthBuild as to why they dropped out, but the common theme is "High School just didn't work for me, YouthBuild is different – it is a loving, caring environment where I can learn." These young people are "disconnected", out of school and out of the workforce, neither employed nor looking for work.

Disconnected Youth are the youth in the middle. They are the youth with barriers to success because they are no longer in school. They are unprepared for work because they lack skills. They cannot enter the community college system because they are not prepared.

The young people that languish in the middle are faced with lack of resources, lack of options, and lack of hope, which leads to high rates of incarceration, reliance on public assistance, and unemployment; costing New York State approximately \$500,000 to 2M\$ over the lifetime of each high school dropout.

In New York State communities where they are located, YouthBuild programs are the only comprehensive option available to young people who are looking for a second chance. Young people who want to work, who want to finish school, and who want to be self-sufficient.

## WHY YOUTHBUILD

YouthBuild programs have provided their services to more than 6,000 young people in NYS, and created more than 2,400 units of affordable housing that are sold to low-income homebuyers. Many of the houses are sold at between \$75,000 - \$90,000.

1. YouthBuild programs transform lives while revitalizing the community. Young people attending YouthBuild get hands-on skills training, are re-engaged in education as they prepare to take the High School Equivalency (HSE/TASC), and as many prepare for college. Additionally, they also give back to their community, completing more than 900 hours of service building affordable housing, weatherizing homes, refurbishing parks for statewide disaster relief projects, and providing much needed senior care at nonprofit nursing homes.
2. YouthBuild programs train students for middle skilled jobs. YouthBuild reviews the NYS regional economies and counsels young people to train and work in high demand NYS jobs. With YouthBuild programs located across the state from NYC to Buffalo, we are already positioned to address regional economic concerns related to youth.

3. YouthBuild programs decrease the impact of the NYS dropout rate. With a High School Equivalency completion rate of 52%, YouthBuild programs are narrowing the education attainment gap for out of school young people.
4. YouthBuild programs are helping young people become self-sustaining taxpayers, and productive citizens who are making positive contributions to society.

## THE NYS YOUTHBUILD FUNDING PICTURE

YouthBuild programs in NYS have relied on federal funds available competitively through the US Department of Labor. Due to sharply increased demands nationally for YouthBuild funding, coupled with generally flat-lined federal funding (about \$78M each of the past four years), it is likely that only a handful of NYS YouthBuild programs will receive US/DOL YouthBuild funding for FY2016. In fact, in 2013 and 2014 only five of the NYS-based programs obtained federal YouthBuild grants, leaving many in jeopardy of closing at the end of 2015. The proposed YouthBuild budget add-on to the FY 2015-16 budget will keep programs open and provide us the opportunity to work toward a self-sustaining plan; as well as to begin looking at program expansion into other communities with a need for YouthBuild.

## SUSTAINABILITY

We are aware that numerous budget requests are submitted for your consideration, and we realize that many of them are legitimate. However, because YouthBuild was started in NYS in 1978, we believe YouthBuild is a "NYS Best Practice" and something you will point to with pride, knowing you are investing in a program with a "proven record" and viability, as well as a program that continues to demonstrate its value in many communities across the state.

We are aware that the Governor indicated he does not favor adding any new programs to the budget, and that he will only look favorably on programs that demonstrate a movement in the direction of self-sustainability. We want to assure the Governor, and you the distinguish members of the finance committees of the NYS Legislature, that YouthBuild does not intend to come back to you every year seeking funds to be added to the Executive Budget. The proposed YouthBuild add-on to the Governor's FY 2015-16, budget will serve to stabilize NYS YouthBuild programs and provide us the opportunity to implement our long term self-sustaining funding strategy. Our long-term strategy includes, but is not limited to:

1. Replicating the very successful YouthBuild Charter Model that has worked in California, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Colorado. We have submitted a Letter of Intent to pursue a Statewide Charter to serve out of school young adults ages 16-24, with the goal of each YouthBuild program in NYS operating as a satellite site.
2. Engaging local districts on a tuition split model that would allow us to engage chronically absent/disengaged young adults in the YouthBuild model, thus recapturing State Aid and lowering the dropout rates through increased re-enrollments.
3. An on-going Statewide Energy Efficiency Training and Social Enterprise system in which YouthBuild students are trained and then hired by local programs to provide fee for service retrofit work in their local communities. The current pilot site for this initiative is in Schenectady, NY, which is creating new jobs in the community with this model, and generating income to partially support program costs.

In our remaining few minutes, we would like you to hear a story from Emanuel McCall a Schenectady YouthBuild graduate. Emanuel's story is similar to many of NYS YouthBuild graduates who, after completing YouthBuild, have self-sustaining jobs, have earned Master degrees, are owners of construction companies, are Directors of YouthBuild programs in their communities, etc., etc. They are productive and engaged young adults, who are contributing to society in a positive way.

Thank you again for this opportunity to present our testimony.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Landi, Chair  
NYS YouthBuild Coalition



Jennifer Lawrence, Upstate Vice Chair  
NYS YouthBuild Coalition