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Press Release

Senator Roxanne J. Persaud and Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi, Social Services Chairs, express disappointment over reduced NYC Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

In the 2020-2021 budget, the Senate and Assembly fought hard to fully fund the state-share of SYEP at \$22.6 million for NYC. However, the City and State could not reach an agreement, and these funds have been unspent

NY, NY- While we appreciate the unique challenges our City faced and continues to face during the COVID-19 pandemic, every other locality in New York State except The City of New York was able to come up with a re-imagined SYEP program. These localities met the necessary criteria for state funding, as determined by the federal government while taking the necessary precautions to protect our youth and service providers from COVID-19.

We also appreciate the efforts New York City took to raise private dollars and shift funding in an attempt to save SYEP amid a large deficit. However, even with those actions, only about 35,000 students were served this year, which is less than half of the nearly 75,000 students that typically participate.

On April 7th, the City of New York prematurely announced that SYEP would be canceled for summer 2020, which resulted in an overall lack of preparedness when that decision

was subsequently reversed. Without adequate time to prepare their programs to include the standard employment components of SYEP and account for the necessary changes to safety protocols and remote work, providers faced an impossible task. Less than half of the students in NYC that usually participate in these programs, including those that need the services, experience, and financial assistance offered through SYEP, were employed this summer.

On June 29th, after the City reversed course and announced that SYEP would, in fact, occur this year, Senator Persaud and Assemblyman Hevesi, along with 73 colleagues, sent a letter to OTDA and the Governor urging them to reconsider a requirement that “at least 80% of SYEP participants 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.”

The state expressed a willingness to work with the City to meet the requirements, allowing for remote work. However, no such program materialized, and communication from both parties did not yield any new or revised plan meeting the requirements to release the \$22.6 million.

The result was an unfortunate impasse, leaving \$22.6 million in unspent Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds, and a program for only less than half of the young people it was intended to serve.

“The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) has given countless youth unique employment training opportunities that have changed their lives and broken the cycle of poverty,” said **Senator Roxanne J. Persaud**, Chair of the Senate Social Services Committee. “We had to make numerous difficult choices in finalizing the FY 2020-2021 budget, but maintaining opportunities for underserved and underrepresented youth was critical, given the impending economic downturn we are currently in.”

"I am very disappointed that New York City and New York State did not come to an agreement on the parameters of the Summer Youth Employment Program. My colleagues in the state legislature fought to provide \$22.6 million for this program for New York City children, in an extremely difficult budget year. It is frustrating to see that money remain unused while tens of thousands of New York's kids were left out of this program this year. We need to do better," said **Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi**, Chair of the Assembly Social Services Committee.

“It is disappointing that the Summer Youth Employment Program wasn’t able to serve tens of thousands of children this summer. While budget cuts were being weighed across all levels of government, we fought hard to maintain funding for this program to serve our young people. This presented an opportunity to provide remote programming, work experience and income to young people whose families have been hit hardest

economically,” said **New York State Senator Velmanette Montgomery**. “There is no reason money for our kids should be left on the table, especially in this environment.”

State Senator Jessica Ramos, Chair of the Senate Labor Committee, said, "SYEP allows students to gain valuable work experience and much needed additional income for their families. The modified program does not suffice for our students and will not suffice for the Legislature. Our students organized and advocated for the program to continue during the pandemic, we must fully fund and expand SYEP as elected officials listening to the voice of the people."

State Senator Robert Jackson said, "I fought hard alongside my colleagues and brave youth advocates to keep SYEP intact during these difficult economic times. As one of the very first SYEP graduates myself, I am heartbroken that the City left this money on the table while so many kids were not reached with the programming we hoped to provide this summer. It's a real shame."

Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon said, “There are days in the legislature that fill one with a sense of accomplishment, knowing that one has helped improve the lives of those who need our help the most. Then there are days like today when one realizes that despite the best legislative intentions, the bureaucracy won and the young people who need us most, lost. To say I am disappointed is an understatement.”

State Senator Jamaal T. Bailey said, “Many families and students depend on the opportunity that SYEP provides to NYC youth. This year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, families have found themselves in significant financial hardships and would’ve greatly benefitted from having the program. Although I appreciate the City’s attempt at creating a re-imagined SYEP program this year under the fiscal constraints caused by COVID-19, I am disappointed by the outcome and I do believe that the program could’ve served more youth in our city. I look forward to being part of the ongoing conversation that brings our youth more opportunity.”

Assemblywoman Inez E. Dickens said, “I found it to be very disappointing that the City and State of New York were unable to develop a working model for this past Summer's Youth Employment Program. It was truly a tremendous effort on the part of the state legislature to work under extreme circumstances to secure the necessary funding that would have provided young people with the independent advantage of work experience. Inaction such as this is what leaves many residents questioning the efficacy of local and state government. We must do better because the people of New York deserve better.”

State Senator James Sanders, Jr. said, “Our youth are an important resource because they are the leaders of tomorrow. Setting them on the right path early is very important. I am disturbed and disheartened that the city fell short of helping so many young New Yorkers, who usually participate in the SYEP, to utilize the program once again, despite COVID-19. SYEP is instrumental in helping youth acquire jobs and internships that will grow their experience and advance their talent. It is our duty to see that the remaining funds are used to help cultivate our youth into a diverse that will benefit all residents.”

“It’s disheartening to see the lack of committed effort from the Mayor and Governor’s office towards the development of the youth of New York City. Our children do not need

to be used as pawns in a political fight when their growth and development are at stake. I'm very disappointed that funding for the Summer Youth Employment was not fully utilized in a year that New York City children needed this program the most. We need to put our children first, they are our future," said **Assemblywoman Alicia Hyndman**.

"The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is a wonderful outlet for young adults to participate in when school is out. That is why we fought to secure the funding to serve as many students as possible. It is unacceptable that the funding did not serve the youth who were left out of the program this year. We have mentored students from SYEP in our community office. It is a win-win for the City. In times, when we are seeing record unemployment numbers, we have to boost the morale of young adults with opportunities for paid work experiences," said **Assemblymember Rebecca Seawright**.

State Senator Brian Kavanagh said, "I was proud to work with Senator Persaud, Assemblymember Hevesi, and our colleagues in the legislature to make SYEP a priority and to secure funds in the budget enacted in April, as we have over many years now. This year, that task was especially difficult given the budget shortfalls we are experiencing due to COVID-19. It is unfathomable to me, during this time of record youth unemployment and a substantial increase in economic insecurity throughout our city, that the State OTDA and the City DYCD could not reach agreement on how to utilize the \$22.6 million that we had allocated and that might have especially benefited residents of some of the communities hardest hit by COVID-19. We must do a better job of taking advantage of the limited resources we have available to provide resources and opportunities to those who need them most."

"It is severely disappointing that the City's modified Summer Youth Employment Program model fails to fully utilize the \$22.6 million that the legislature fought hard to preserve this year," said **Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou**. "Many low-income households rely on SYEP funding to keep afloat in the summer. With growing unemployment rates and an economic crisis at our doorsteps, a proper SYEP model can be life changing for struggling households. In addition, the SYEP helps close the racial wealth gap that exists from systemic racism in our society. Considering that 85% of our SYEP participants were young people of color, the SYEP provides direct assistance to young participants to provide short-term financial assistance and professional development that creates pathways to higher paying roles or higher education. In my office, we have hosted interns from the SYEP every summer except this summer. Each of these young participants have gone on to attend college or found their passion while working here. It is extremely frustrating that money remains unused while so many of our young participants can benefit from an expansion of this program. We can do better. I urge the City to work with our state partners to modify and create a SYEP that can fully utilize the resources we have in this tough budget and provide real assistance for our young New Yorkers."

"For years, SYEP has connected young New Yorkers to real employment opportunities, helping them develop important skills to compete in an increasingly demanding job market," said **State Senator Gustavo Rivera**. "It is unconscionable that the City and State did not compromise and adapt the program to these unprecedented times, leaving

more than \$22 million that we fought for unused. This is a huge disservice to our youth, especially to those from disadvantaged communities who undoubtedly would have used this money to support their families during such tough economic times.”

State Senator John C. Liu, Chairperson of the Senate's Committee on NYC Education, said, "Truly disheartening that the \$22.6 million allocated to SYEP went unspent. NYC students have suffered enough this year. Depriving underserved kids of summer employment opportunities is inexplicable, especially considering NYC was the only locality in the state that failed to develop a SYEP program. The city needs to do better by our kids, and be a more responsible steward of funding for youth."

“This year presented a crucial opportunity for NYC to step up to provide meaningful opportunities for our youth, who even more than other years desperately needed jobs, training, and the chance to engage constructively with other young people and mentors,” said **Senator Julia Salazar**, who represents North Brooklyn. “Young people in my communities are hurting and it was devastating - even though funds were available - that these opportunities were not provided this summer to more youth.”

"As New York City begins to re-open, we need to ensure we are providing resources for our youth. Every year New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) provides thousands of youth aged 14- 24 with various career development platforms, allowing them the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience and create a positive source of income for themselves. Many families within our community look forward to this program. We need to do all we can to ensure our children are not only able to earn income but have a positive outlet for future summers. We must make them a priority,” said **State Senator Kevin Parker**.

State Senator Luis R. Sepúlveda said, "For years the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) has created thousands of employment opportunities and provided work experience for young New Yorkers. In underserved areas like the South Bronx, where I represent, youth employment opportunities change lives, especially in low-income communities where SYEP is often crucial towards long-term employment and sufficient wages. Despite the push to protect funding for SYEP, tens of thousands of young New Yorkers could not participate in the program, and the budget we secured remained unused. In the face of historic unemployment rates, I am disappointed to see that New York City and New York State could not develop a framework for a modified and re-imagined SYEP plan. A plan that would protect our youth's health and safety while ensuring our youth could access these vital employment services and urgent financial assistance."

Assemblywoman Nily Rozic said, "We faced difficult decisions for the FY20-21 state budget but fought to keep funding alive for SYEP knowing how invaluable this experience has been for young people across the City. It is shameful that this money was left on the table as thousands of students -- who have already been profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic -- were excluded from this year's program and critical services."

"New York State is at a crossroads. During this crucial time, it is extremely disheartening that tens of thousands of New York City's young adults were not given the opportunity to participate in the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) despite the Assembly's \$22.6 million support of this initiative. We must re-evaluate our commitment to our children if we want to break the cycles of poverty that persist throughout our state and ensure upward mobility," said **Assembly Member Aravella Simotas**.

"The NYC SYEP program is an integral part to keeping NYC youth engaged and productive during the months they are not in school. SYEP experiences help develop responsibility and work ethics, crucial for success in their adult lives and it is imperative that we invest heavily in our youth to ensure there are responsible and capable adults for us to leave our society to. To not use \$22.6 million in funds for our youth is a grave injustice and I challenge New York City and New York State to come to an agreement and rectify this," said **Assemblyman Walter Mosley**.

"At a time of scarce resources and constrained opportunities, it is more than disappointing that the city and state could not come together for New York's kids. State legislators fought to fund the Summer Youth Employment Program, which has created opportunities for many young people. We have an obligation to fight for all New Yorkers, and we must do more for New York's kids," said **Assemblymember Mathyde Frontus**.

Senator Diane Savino said, "Our office has always been a proud host for countless interns through the Summer Youth Employment Program, we have had talented, eager, and hardworking young people that I have had the privilege to get to know," said Senator Savino. "We fought hard to secure money in the budget for this program in a very difficult year and it is disheartening that New York City has left this money unused while thousands of kids are left with no opportunities for work this summer."

Senator Zellnor Y. Myrie said, "The Summer Youth Employment Program is a critical tool to support our young people, especially in a year where the need is greater than ever. It is imperative the State and City do more for underserved youth in the midst of the pandemic."

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