

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

November 15, 2017

The Honorable R. Alexander Acosta
Secretary of Labor
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta,

I am writing to you regarding the need to expand access to apprenticeships in areas with high rates of community violence and high levels of youth unemployment. In your role as Chair of the President's Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion, I urge you to prioritize identifying strategies to increase apprenticeship opportunities for youth in underserved communities who may not currently have access to these programs.

You and other Administration officials have often voiced your support for apprenticeship programs as a means to improve skills development and prepare youth for the workforce. At the same time, the President's Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposed cutting federal job training programs by 40 percent. The President has also asked agencies to recommend workforce development programs for elimination. I have serious concerns with these inconsistencies in the Administration's workforce development policies and its efforts to reduce federal funding for job training programs. However, I believe that the establishment of the Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion presents an opportunity to carry out a thoughtful evaluation of steps the federal government can take to expand registered apprenticeship opportunities.

Youth who are out-of-school and out-of-work have lower lifetime earnings, face higher rates of poverty, and are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system than youth who are employed. Across the country, Americans who live in communities with concentrated poverty and unemployment are also more likely to become victims of violent crime. In Chicago, youth job training programs like the City's One Summer Chicago program have had significant success in preparing at-risk youth for long-term employment. Importantly, these programs have also been shown to reduce violence among youth. A recent study by the University of Chicago Urban Labs found that the 2013 One Summer Chicago Plus jobs program reduced violent-crime arrests among participants by 33 percent.

Nothing stops a bullet like a job. It is imperative that the federal government build on the success of Chicago and other cities by expanding access to job training, including apprenticeships. These programs give young people the opportunity to escape a vicious cycle of poverty and violence. I encourage all members of the Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion to give serious thought to how apprenticeships can serve youth in communities that are faced with chronic unemployment and high rates of violent crime.

As the task force prepares its report for the President on strategies and proposals to promote apprenticeships, I urge you identify programs and policies that will help ensure our nation's most at-risk youth have access to pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dick Durbin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator