CONGRESSMAN

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4th CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS

Connecting Youth to Jobs Act of 2026

Over the past two decades, public health and economic crises and the ensuing public policy responses have only exacerbated inequality faced by young people. The youth unemployment rate is nearly 10%, more than twice the overall unemployment rate, and is substantially higher for young people facing barriers to employment. Research demonstrates that youth unemployment reduces lifetime earnings, increases the likelihood of future unemployment, leads to skill depreciation, and worsens health outcomes.

To address this crisis, Congress must enact a national subsidized jobs program that creates living-wage employment opportunities for young people facing barriers to employment and historically disadvantaged youth. That's why I am reintroducing the *Connecting Youth to Jobs Act*. Specifically, the bill would:

- **Guarantee employment opportunities for youth with barriers to unemployment and historically disadvantaged populations.**

  The *Connecting Youth to Jobs Act* guarantees federally subsidized employment opportunities by providing States and local areas with funds for employment programs that lead to unsubsidized, full time employment or provide the necessary skills for at least one postsecondary credential.

  Youth with barriers to employment are broadly defined to include out-of-school youth, low-income youth, youth impacted by the justice system, foster youth, youth experiencing homelessness, and more. Program participants must be between the ages of 14 and 24.

  The bill sets a minimum wage of at least $17 for all program participants and protects their right to join in union activity when applicable. The bill also ensures that income received under the program does not affect participants' eligibility for SNAP or other benefits under any federal program or under any state or local program financed by federal funds.

- **Establish a $10 billion competitive grant for providing wraparound services to youth employment program participants and work-based learning opportunities for youth**.

  The bill also creates a competitive grant program for community organizations, labor unions, tribal organizations and other nonprofits and partnerships to provide direct financial assistance for support services that help youth overcome barriers to sustained employment. These support services may include housing, health care, transportation, child care, access to technology, and more.

  These grants may also be used by eligible organizations to connect youth to employment opportunities, registered apprenticeship programs, or public education opportunities.

- **Direct the Department of Labor (DOL) to collect youth employment program performance data and submit a report to Congress.**

  The *Connecting Youth to Jobs Act* requires the collection of performance data on each funded program within one year of enactment and annually thereafter. It also requires DOL to submit public, annual reports to Congress with a review and assessment of the performance data and any relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of Labor.