



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
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CICELY HARRIS
Chairperson

SHATIC MITCHELL
District Manager

May 7, 2020

Dear Elected Official:

We are reaching out to you on behalf of the members of Community Board 10 about a matter affecting the social welfare, health and safety of our district. On April 7, 2020, The Commissioner for the Department of Youth and Community Development, William Chong, announced that the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) will not operate during the summer of 2020. It is our belief that this action by the City will negatively impact 75,000 low income youth and their families who live in New York City.

SYEP has been an institution in New York City since 1963. It was then, and continues to be, the nation's largest youth employment program. It's popularity and value to our community is based on the reality that New York City has the reputation for being the toughest place in the country for teenagers to get a summer job. And although the program served 75,000 young people between the ages of 14-24, last year, there were over 150,000 applications submitted by youth who wanted to participate in the program. The SYEP program costs \$124 million dollars and is funded through City Tax Levy and New York State dollars, Federal Community Service Block Grants and the Mayor's Fund.

Community Board 10 is concerned about the consequences associated with not operating this important program in our neighborhoods this summer. Our concerns are centered on public safety as well as the loss of opportunity for the young people of our community. We agree with those Public Policy experts who think that having 75,000 young people, having nothing productive to do this summer is a serious challenge. These young people have already been impacted by remote learning and the isolation associated with it. The loss of SYEP further exacerbates the problem and creates health and safety concerns for us all. SYEP provides youth with the opportunity to explore career interests and paid job experiences for a six-week period between July and August. Beyond being actively engaged, youth participants develop workplace skills as well as social, civic and leadership skills helping to prepare them for their future roles as members of the New York City labor force.

Youth participants earn minimum wage for a 24-hour work week. Most of these young workers are exposed to the importance of banking as they are encouraged to open a bank account. Some programs also provide incentives for youth to save a portion of their earnings, promoting financial literacy. These are valuable life skills for young adults and are taught by the Not for Profit organizations who partner with The Department of Youth and Community Development. SYEP in many ways is a “rite of passage” for the youth of our community. It is their first opportunity to experience being a provider of service rather than a recipient of service. It is for many of them the first time that they will be able to support their families financially, by paying for school clothes and supplies in the Fall and contributing to household expenses like rent and groceries.

We support Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Youth Advocates and the Not For Profit organizations who believe that this program is too important to the development of the youth it serves and the New York City community, for it not to take place this summer. There is a symbiotic relationship between education and training for youth. Several months of remote learning combined with the loss of the experience of SYEP, is too much of a sacrifice to ask of our youth, our families and our community. To quote Public Advocate, Williams, The Mayor should treat this program as an “essential service”. The 200 providers who have operated this program for decades believe that there are safe and innovative ways to implement the program using virtual platforms and project -based learning models. We are asking that you work with them and us to make sure that the youth of our community are not denied the opportunity that has been afforded young people in this city since 1963. Doing nothing is not an option. Please join with us in saving the Summer Youth Employment Program for the youth of our community.

Please know that we need you to act now. There is not much time to organize in a manner to make our efforts count. We look forward to hearing about your efforts on behalf of our young people at our Community Board meeting on Wednesday May 6, 2020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cicely Harris".

Cicely Harris
Chairwoman
Manhattan Community Board 10