

Testimony of Gary Jenkins

The New York City Department of Social Services | Human Resources Administration

New York City Council Youth Services Committees

Oversight Hearing – Oversight - Disconnected Youth (out of school and out of work)

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Good morning Chairperson Eugene and members of the Committee on Youth Services. Thank you for inviting me to discuss our programs and initiatives which are helping to give young people the skills and training that lead to sustained and meaningful participation in the workforce. My name is Gary Jenkins and I am the Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Family Independence Administration at the New York City Department of Social Services | Human Resources Administration (HRA). I am pleased to join my colleagues in government today to discuss the Administration's efforts to set clear pathways for youth to achieve long-term economic security.

HRA is the nation's largest social services agency assisting over 3 million New Yorkers annually through the administration of more than 12 major support programs. HRA also administers IDNYC, the country's most successful municipal identification program.

Among other assistance, HRA provides these key supports for low-income children and adults:

- 2.2 million New Yorkers receive Medicaid through HRA and over one million more through the State Health Insurance Exchange;
- 1.68 million New Yorkers are receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamps and families and individuals receive millions of meals served through food pantries and community kitchens;
- 685,000 New Yorkers receive home energy assistance every winter;
- 107,000 New Yorkers receive one-time cash assistance over the course of a year to prevent evictions and utility shutoffs or provide assistance with other emergencies; and
- 59,145 New Yorkers receive employment services, including 11,510 18 -24 year olds.
- Approximately 250,000 NYC children receive more than \$750 million dollars in child support collections each year.

Low-income New Yorkers depend on these vital supports to maintain employment and to achieve housing stability. Our benefits and entitlement programs serve both employed and

unemployed New Yorkers, and more than 28,000 of our clients receiving cash assistance are employed fulltime. However, their incomes are so low that they still qualify for cash assistance. This is why it was so critical that HRA developed an individualized approach to employment service delivery, because New Yorkers are not homogeneous and arrive at our door for many different reasons.

Moving away from a one-size-fits-all employment approach to a new, more diverse, individualized approach allows HRA to focus on improving employment and training outcomes so that more clients have an opportunity to achieve economic stability, secure employment, and move off the caseload and out of poverty. Under the prior approach, 34% of clients who were reported as receiving employment assistance ended up returning to the caseload again within 12 months.

HRA's new employment services model connects clients to individualized education, training, employment and other services that gives them the skills and training they need to compete in the job market and reach their maximum earning potential. Of the 59,145 employable clients on HRA's caseload, 44% lack a high school diploma; without a high school education it is difficult to earn even \$20,000 – and in New York City that will not take you very far. This is why we've worked with our partners in the State to provide clients with the opportunity to gain a high school diploma or college level education. As of November 18, 2016 there were 3,798 HRA clients enrolled in a college or university and 8,402 HRA clients enrolled in a high school or equivalent program.

Following the December 31, 2014 approval by the State Office of Temporary Assistance and Disability Assistance (OTDA) of the HRA Employment Plan, we began developing and implementing significant employment program reforms. Since that time we have steadily rolled out programs and initiatives that are rooted in best practices and that focus on achieving sustainable outcomes. I will briefly mention some of these improvements:

- We've implemented new employment services contracts to ensure alignment with the new vision and are no longer relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. This youth-specific approach to serving youth has been cited by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP): "While cash assistance under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant is not commonly thought of as a 'youth-serving' program, the reality is that one-third of adult recipients of TANF benefits are under age 25¹." HRA's new program, YouthPathways, represents one of the few large-scale programs nationwide to tackle this issue.

¹ <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Young-Adults-and-TANF.pdf>

- We've are phasing out the Work Experience Program (WEP), which provided clients with limited opportunities to engage in simulated work experience with other City agencies. WEP is being replaced with more meaningful opportunities for internships and community service that align more closely to each client's area of interest.
- We've improved assessments to address each client's actual strengths and needs.
- We've maximized education, training and employment-related services to build career pathways out of poverty.
- We've eliminated unnecessary punitive and duplicative actions that lead to preventable negative actions.

HRA has also made policy and procedure shifts that allow us to better serve our clients, including young people with Limited English Proficiency and/or low literacy. A few of these policy shifts include:

- Allowing 2 and 4-year college enrollment to count as a work activity in accordance with state law;
- Encouraging participants age 24 and under to participate in full-time Adult Basic Education (ABE), sector-based contextualized literacy training program, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, or High School Education (HSE) prep programs; and
- Expanding services for clients with Limited English Proficiency by now allowing them to participate in full-time English as a Second Language coursework

YouthPathways

While our recent policy reforms benefit all of our clients, we recognized that there was a particular need to focus resources on better connecting low-income young people to meaningful employment and training services. YouthPathways is a new HRA program, recognized as a national model by CLASP and steeped in labor market demand and youth development principles. We anticipate that once fully ramped up the YouthPathways model will foster a more successful transition to the job market for approximately 14,550 youth age 18-24. Defining a clear career pathway for these young people is critical to interrupting patterns of generational poverty and dependence on public assistance.

On November 16, just last week, HRA selected vendors for three new employment programs. In total, more than 68,000 HRA clients are expected to benefit from these programs annually. We have full confidence that the selected vendors will advance our workforce development goals and efforts for all of our clients, including young people age 18-24. We are pleased to announce that YouthPathways contracts were awarded to 6 organizations with a proven record of success, including: ResCare Workforce Services, America Works of New York, Inc., Fedcap Rehabilitation Services, Goodwill Industries of Greater NY and Northern NJ, Inc., Maximus

Human Services Inc., and East River Development Alliance. These vendors will be working with the following subcontractors: Queens Library, Association of Community Employment, Avondale Care Group, Career & Educational Consultants, Community Service Society, Futures and Options, Hellenic-American Neighborhood Action Committee (HANAC), Project Renewal, Pro-Placement Solutions, Quality Employment Services, and StartFresh.

HRA encourages vendors to utilize innovative approaches to service delivery. We feel strongly that in order to yield successful outcomes, YouthPathways programs must be comprised of the following components:

- Frequent client engagement and a career pathway developed in accordance with the client's strengths and needs;
- One-on-one financial counseling, social capital-building and connection to high-quality youth services;
- Collaborative partnership with DOE to enhance education, training and work-readiness programming; and
- Provision of job-readiness and skill development activities for up to one year post-placement.

While it's too early to report on outcomes we are hopeful that soon we will have many positive success stories to share with this Committee.

HRA Youth Programs

The YouthPathways program does not represent the full range and scope of employment programs and services at HRA. We also offer:

- Internships related to a career pathway that meet the State Department of Labor standards (funded through a separate RFP for Internship Placement Services (IPS));
- Subsidized transitional jobs programs, including positions at the Parks Department and in the private sector (e.g., the Parks Opportunity Program (POP) and the Shelter Exit Transitional Jobs (SET) program, which has been transferred to HRA from the Department of Homeless Services, to promote shelter move-outs); and
- HireNYC a free program that connects cash assistance clients and low-income workers to jobs generated by economic development projects and also requires human services vendors to hire at least one Public Assistance recipient for every \$250,000 received in City funding.
- The Support Through Employment Program (STEP) which pairs unemployed or underemployed noncustodial parents with a vendor Child Support services through HRA's employment service contracts to help them with job readiness training,

placement services, vocational training. Most participants who find work through STEP hold jobs that pay above the minimum wage.

Other Youth Initiatives

HRA's Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) is also moving from a one-size fits all approach to developing a model to help reduce income inequality for the nearly 20,000 young parents, recognizing the unique needs of young people. OCSE's efforts include:

- A Youth Policy Committee where youth development experts from the public and private sectors are meeting monthly to design a new service model that supports both custodial and noncustodial parents under the age of 25 by addressing the service needs of young parents.
- Partnerships with community-based organizations serving youth to help young noncustodial parents connect to OCSE services such as debt reduction and order modification programs and employment.
- The Early Intervention Program gives noncustodial parents under the age of 25 an extra level of support so that they can be best positioned to navigate the child support program by reaching out to each young parent with a new child support order to ensure they understand the program and how to obtain assistance if needed.
- The No Kidding Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program which uses peer educators who were teen parents to educate students on the realities and challenges of being a teen parent. The program has reached nearly 27,000 young people. We believe that this will help strengthen families and ultimately lead to better outcomes for NYC youth through public schools, youth programs, community based organizations and events since 2010.

In closing, I would like to mention some of the cross agency programs and initiatives that are lifting individuals and entire communities out of poverty. These programs are available to both clients and non-clients and include the following:

- **Jobs-Plus:** a partnership between HRA, NYCHA, CEO, Consumer Affairs, and YMI designed to increase the level of earnings and employment among residents of public housing. Services include job placement and retention as well as both community engagement and one-on-one financial counseling. Job-Plus has over 12,800 members, and services are offered to 23 developments across the 5 boroughs. This program will soon expand to 4 additional developments.
- **Work Progress Programs (WPP):** Established by CEO and HRA, the WPP is a subsidized wage program for low-income young people enrolled in youth services provided by community-based organizations.

- **West Farms Workforce1 Career Center:** a partnership between HRA, DOE and SBS targeting New Yorkers age 18-24 who are not working and not in school. The Center integrates HRA's support to access and navigate public benefits, DOE's D79 contextualized high school equivalency preparation, and SBS Workforce1 services to prepare and connect candidates to job and training opportunities.
- **Special Projects Center:** in October 2015, HRA and ACS announced a new strategic partnership. HRA has made its Special Projects Center in Manhattan, located at E. 16th Street, available to youth who are transitioning out of Foster Care. The office allows ACS to easily communicate with HRA to ensure that youth are receiving adequate and appropriate services.

Reforming and improving our employment programs and client outcomes will not happen overnight, but we feel confident that the changes we've made will promote a greater likelihood of independence and self-sufficiency for young people and indeed all of our clients. We welcome continued collaboration with the Council and look forward to answering your questions and hearing from the advocates.

Thank you and I look forward to the Committee's questions.